

# Joseph Smith is Visited by Porter Rockwell

## 1844 Nauvoo Christmas was quiet, subdued

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Christmas day in 1844 in Nauvoo, Ill., was quiet and subdued compared to the yuletide celebration on Dec. 25 the year before. On that day in 1843, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum had celebrated Christmas to the fullest.

After being awakened about 1 o'clock in the morning by a large group of harmonizing carolers, they had returned to rest until shortly after daybreak. An hour or so was devoted to necessary Church business. Then the day was spent celebrating Christmas by feasting and dancing "in a most cheerful and friendly manner." The evening was capped off by a large party at the Prophet's home. A long-haired interloper barged into the room. Joseph and the chief of police tried to throw the invader out and a scuffle ensued. In that effort the party crasher's face was exposed in full to Joseph, who later noted, "to my great surprise and joy untold, I discovered it was my long-tried, warm, but cruelly persecuted friend, Orrin Porter Rockwell." Rockwell had escaped from the Missouri jails after spending more than a year therein (without conviction), and had made his way to Nauvoo. It was, for Joseph, the end of a perfect day in which the Lord's birth was celebrated and an old friend restored to the fold. (See History of the Church 6:134-135.)

Christmas in 1844 was, in many ways, a watershed era in the history of the Church. While the holiday season was observed, it was on a much smaller scale than before. The reasons for this were many.

First, Church members were still recovering from the brutal blow of Joseph and Hyrum's murders less than six months previous. Second, there was a vigorous effort to complete the temple so as many people as possible could do their temple work there before the inevitable exodus from the city. Third was the press of renewed missionary efforts and events surrounding a huge seventies conference slated to be held Dec. 26-30. Much of the time was filled in organizing that event.

But the spirit of the season was not ignored, especially for the less fortunate. On Dec. 20, 1844, [Brigham Young](#) noted that William Clayton "had some conversation with Brother Reynolds T. Cahoon respecting making a feast for the poor and proposed to do it on New Year's day. Daniel H. Wells, Esq., agreed to give ten dollars to aid the feast for the poor."

All celebration was not postponed until 1845 rolled around, though. On Christmas day President Young and others gathered at the home of one of the Saints to observe the day in eating and spreading good cheer.

On that occasion [Brigham Young](#) wrote: "I spent an agreeable time at Brother Coolidge's in company with Elders Heber C. Kimball, George A. Smith, A

masa T. M. Lyman, [John Taylor](#) and their ladies. The band was in attendance. We partook of a substantial dinner: after which I made a few remarks expressive of my good feelings and love to my brethren." (HC 7:328.)

No doubt the contrast between the previous Christmas and that of 1844 was keenly felt by the membership in general. Apparently, too, some of the Saints had expressed the desire to avenge Joseph and Hyrum's deaths.

But [Brigham Young](#) knew that this would be folly. He continued: "I remarked that the Lord would never suffer us to overcome our enemies while we cherished feelings of revenge; when we prevailed over our enemies it must be from a sense of duty and not of revenge." (Ibid.)

In short, it was a season of transition for the Church. It was observed with a sense of mourning for the slain Prophet and his brother, the Patriarch. There was a continued sorting of feelings, a busy time of focused work on the temple, renewed missionary effort and preparation for the trek west, which would begin in earnest in a little over a year.

In Brigham Young's characteristic style, it became a time to press forward without dwelling on things past that could not be changed. He rightly observed that they could only be accepted and ultimate justice be left in the hands of Him whose birth they celebrated that Dec. 25, 150 years ago.

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